TQM Implementation for Effective Project Management

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ABSTRACT  
Anyone who has ever been involved in (managing) a project is most probably convinced of a complex correlation between project constraints, and a constant need to compromise. There lies the paradox of the conventional wisdom in project planning, setting the objectives and constraints, and assessing project success. The world does interfere with the plans through the ambiguity of human relations in project networks, through dynamics of organizational environments and limitations in the availability of resources at any point of time. These principles of risk apply to almost all projects regardless of their size, nature or mission.

KEY WORDS  
TQM, project management, customer implementation

JEL CODES  
M14, M16, M52

1. Introduction

The emerging paradigm of project management

In recent years the discipline of project management (PM) has changed its application dramatically to accommodate emerging management processes and philosophies related to implementation of organizational development and strategic change. Contemporary literature on best business practice introduces many different terms related to PM, including management by projects, project-based organizations, project-oriented businesses, temporary project organization and project form of organizational structure. Projects are becoming a template for operational and strategic re-design.

Reasons are numerous, and they reflect endeavours of modern organizations to respond to the environmental changes by adopting specific patterns of coping behaviour:

- the implementation of strategic management through projects makes the achievement of highest returns possible by optimal utilization of resources available (including time, money and people) more realistic;
• the expansion of human knowledge creates the need for an effective organizational design to support knowledge management for competitive advantage through intra-organizational integration, professional and functional concurrence based on project teams, inter-organizational networking and "win-win" partnerships in project situations;
• companies are increasingly seeking the way of effective product development and market expansion-management by projects provides a disciplined approach to gaining competitive advantage by getting the right product, in time, to market.

The emerging paradigm of PM is, thus, not a breakthrough of new ideas but a renaissance of the discipline in a contemporary business context. It is concerned with elaboration of systems and processes originating in the classical, conventional wisdom of PM, and with their application to the general organizational theory. Traditionally, PM has been regarded as an exclusive management process of scientific nature with specialized planning, monitoring and control techniques, and applied to the operations of very few project-oriented industries such as construction, engineering and defence. It is now being increasingly accepted as an inclusive concept integrated into general organizational endeavour to provide better quality to customers through effective intra-organizational integration and optimal utilization of scarce resources. Consequently, as a complex managerial process, it positions itself among other organizational processes such as TQM, organizational learning or kaizen that ensure an optimal balance between internal organizational design of the firm and its emerging strategies.

There are examples all over the place. The process of creation of strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions is now being approached and managed as a project; implementations of quality management systems and other organizational development initiatives take the form of projects; management consultancy services are essentially projects; writing an article for a journal by invitation is a project. We may like to stop here and consider how many current undertakings in our own organizational settings are characterized, or managed, or at least referred to as projects. And we may even not be operating in the industry that is project-based in conventional terms. Are these projects being effectively managed? Are they successful? And how do we know it? As PM repositions itself from a middle-management focused discipline into a business philosophy to support organizational strategic change, it is crucial to communicate and establish an appropriate learning attitude to reap the benefits of the new organizational order.

2. Unbounded approach to bounded rationality in PM

Our discussion evolves around a framework created to increase awareness among a much broader audience than just project managers of the emerging applications of the PM discipline and its implications for project-oriented businesses. It intends to encourage a creative inquiry system into the areas of concern for successful management of projects and to conceptualize an approach to PM development and learning efforts.

The framework has been designed, used and tested as a teaching tool at the introductory stages of PM courses on MBA and general business and management development schemes. The diversity of student cohorts implies that a number of course participants may not necessarily manage projects themselves. They are often in a situation to make project-related decisions from their senior executive positions, or to facilitate project networks from a functional management level by releasing resources, or to participate in a temporary project sub-organization as project
team members. While trying to meet their expectations related to the learning outcomes, we have noticed two things:

1) a common concern across courses and classes about a high level of project failure that causes organization-wide disappointment, insecurity and mistrust; and
2) a general warning that ambiguities will keep accumulating unless the phenomenon of PM is put into a broader organizational and social context.

3. How TQM propositions can support practical implementation of the framework

Anyone who has ever been involved in (managing) a project is most probably convinced of a complex correlation between project constraints, and a constant need to compromise. One can rightly ask a question: if meeting time, budget and specification requirements within a given scope of project work are always a matter of trade-off among these variables, can we then talk about total customer satisfaction in a project situation at all? How should quality in a project situation be defined? Is a project successfully managed if there is no time and budget overrun, but the end-product is of no or a little use to the client or end-user? What if the changes in the clients industry or environment in general, and the consequent changes in their strategic mission during the project execution made the project goal obsolete? How can this be prevented, and project product quality assured?

There lies the paradox of the conventional wisdom in project planning, setting the objectives and constraints, and assessing project success. The world does interfere with the plans through the ambiguity of human relations in project networks, through dynamics of organizational environments and limitations in the availability of resources at any point of time. These principles of risk apply to almost all projects regardless of their size, nature or mission.

This imposes a great challenge for applications of quality assurance and TQM philosophy to the PM process of reconciling project constraints with the often adversarial interests of those with a stake in the project. In our discussion this reconciliation is referred to as project congruence, and the associated endeavour and techniques as PM process.

The integration of the framework layers into unbounded conceptualization of project strategies and effective management learning, evolves around the following major PM propositions:

1. Listening to the customers and understanding their requirements and expectations of the project outcome, meaning - linking the idea with the reality. As Kaderlan (quoted in Nelson, 1996) notes: "Expectations are like land mines. If you aren't clear about them, they can explode at the worst possible moment and destroy the trust you have worked so hard to develop." In turn, the largest single component of such misunderstanding is over how "success" of the project is to be defined. Many professional consultants and project managers think they know what clients want of them, but frequently this differs from what the client truly wants or expects (Stasiowski and Burstein, 1994).

2. Planning realistically for time, budget, material and human resources while contemplating the re-planning of these to ensure the match with changing customer requirements and expectations throughout the project life cycle. Although each project functions as a temporary self-contained organization, never does it operate in isolation from everything else. The project plans based on the initial idea and expectations are only our best estimates of what is happening right now and what the future will hold. Because of the inherent uncertainty associated with any
human endeavour, while planning we must contemplate the inevitability of re-planning throughout the project life cycle in order to maintain validity of project goals and customer expectations in harmony with changing reality. This has to be a common concern of all stakeholders in the project network from the early stages, and communication among them is important.

3. **Ensuring project leadership skills necessary to buildup effective project teams.** There is almost no project that evolves around a single profession, function, field of expertise or industry. Most of the time it is through some sort of functional and professional concurrence or inter-organizational coalition that the resources for achieving project goals are pulled together to match the stakeholders expectations and project objectives. Each entity within the project's customer-supplier network brings in the inherent culture, attitudes, behaviour, and professional knowledge and ways of doing business. This variety needs to be anticipated and appreciated in the formation of the project team, selection of project management, negotiation for resources and establishment of specific project organization with its structure, individual roles and performance measurements. The linkages and acceptance of the temporary project organization by parent organizations and its imposition over the functional, routine order represents a fragile area for project success.

4. **Having a sound communication system in place that spans the project network.** The art of effective design of the temporary project organization is in making such multi-professional, cross-functional, multi-organizational, and often cross-industrial and cross-national con...

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There is an open ended question - how can the awareness of major propositions of TQM philosophy help in overcoming the obstacles to effective PM? The core aspects of TQM culture (see, for example, Cicmil 1997), such as:

- integration of internal and external customer-supplier chains for the provision of better service to customers;
- error prevention through quality assurance systems;
- employee development and care; and
- good leadership;

May form a sound base for project management development if integrated into organizational culture and practices of all parties in the project network.

4. **Conclusions**

The awareness of PM as it emerges in the modern business world must not be limited to the PM professionals or become a privilege of the industries that are project-oriented by definition such as those in the engineering domain. It is not only relevant to middle management level, from where project managers are most likely to be recruited, either. Nor does it fall solely into the functional responsibility of production/operations management group. PM philosophy should be communicated to all levels of organizational structure because of:

- its increasing application to processes of organizational development and strategic change (such as implementation of quality initiatives, new market or product development, or formation of strategic alliances) consequently with immense and immediate strategic implications for the parent organization;
• the unlimited potential for organizational learning and culture change with respect to internal, cross-functional and cross-professional integration and team work, as well as partnering, networking and cooperation within the external customer-supplier chain;
• the need to establish a basis for real TQM practice where all processes and efforts involved in the project are linked and managed with the primary aim of ensuring that the goals of the project are continuously monitored for clarity and validity throughout the project life cycle, and that the client's (and other project customers') expectations are fully met;
• the need for unbounded thinking in optimal planning for time, cost and resources which should reflect realistic assessment of these expectations, anticipate possible changes in the project context and accommodate aspects of organizational behaviour of the parties involved in the project.

The concept presented here by means of the framework intends to put the notion of TQM into PM perspectives, to highlight the areas of concern and initiate discussion of applicability of such inquiry systems to the realities of organizational life. This is an attempt to provide a useful way of conceptualizing recent developments in the subject of PM, to explore linkages between successful management of projects and TQM, and to invite an exchange of ideas and experience in this area of management development and organizational learning.

Further research, debate and experience in this area will eventually answer many questions that management of projects is currently facing.

References